

## A FORSAKEN BRIDE.

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AUTHOR OF  
BROWNIE'S TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER I.

A WIFE'S MALEDITION.

Leamington Towers was ablaze with light, from the top of its graceful, fretted turrets to the broad marble steps which led up to the grand entrance hall, whose rich and tasteful furnishings gave a faint idea of the elegance awaiting one beyond.

A brilliant festival or reception is about to celebrate the election of Sir Dudley Durward to the peerage.

The "royal patent," creating him Earl Durward, and thus elevating him to a position in the Upper House, or House of Lords, had only recently been received, and had occasioned great rejoicing in the object of this honor, and among his sympathizers and friends.

It was a position for which Sir Dudley had toiled early and late, and over the success which had at last crowned his efforts he was now very excited.

In the grand drawing room at Leamington Towers—all white and gold, exuding where the rich fabrics had been laid wild contrast and filled the air with their fragrance—the brilliant assembly stands ready to receive its guests, when they shall arrive, to tender them their good wishes and congratulations.

He is a powerfully built, handsome man of about thirty. But his face has a hard, cruel look—a look which tells of cunning plotting, and of a fierce intolerance of anything which stands in the way of his pride and ambition, that repels one at a glance.

His eyes are black and gleaming, and harbor a fiery gleam in their dusky depths which is not portentous of good, to any one or anything which may arise to thwart him in any of his daring schemes or desires, though just at present they are very bright with the triumph of success.

His nose and mouth are large and coarse, his lips are sensual in their expression, and habitually curved at the corners with a sneering expression not pleasant to behold.

He stands there in the centre of that luxurious room beneath the blazing chandelier, his hands clasped behind him, his head thrown proudly back, and his thoughts full of that day when he shall go up to London, take his long-aspired-for seat in Parliament among the nobility of the land, and bend every one to his will by the power of his eloquence and his indomitable perseverance.

His father had been an impoverished baronet, with neither energy nor pride. After his death, and upon coming into possession of the estate, Sir Dudley had bent all his energies to the improvement of the fallen fortunes of the house. His ambition knew no bounds; he was determined to rise to the very topmost round of the ladder of wealth, and bend every one to his will.

Everything had been turned into money. He had married, and extended his estate until it became one of the finest in the country. He then began to aspire to political honors, was elected as member to the House of Commons for his borough, and acquired himself thereby most honorable.

This, however, did not satisfy him, and he determined to apply for letters patent, which would create him a peer of the realm. The success of his under-taking we already know, and we will now return to him as he stands in his princely home awaiting further honors.

A door at the farther end of the magnificent room softly swings open, there is a moment of stillness, and finally hails just beside the proud master of Leamington Towers. A daintily gloved hand is gently laid upon his arm, and a voice, sweet as the music of fairy bells, says:

"Dudley, I am glad of your victory. I hastened down before any one should arrive, that I might be the first to congratulate you."

He started at the words, and his face changed in a moment from its look of triumph to a bitter sneer.

"Oh, you congratulate me, do you? I suppose you do not feel in the least elated at the prospect of occupying the position of an Earl's wife."

He turned fiercely upon her as he spoke, and his eye never softened, nor did the least spark of admiration or affection light up his coarse features, as he beheld the fair-like vision before him.

"No, you are not, you're not, and pray what good will all your richness do me?" he said, harshly.

"I thought, Dudley, that you would be pleased to know that I shared your joy," she answered, milder, set with a gentle dignity which became her well.

"You know," she added, "that I am only glad for you."

"Glad for me, are you? and pray what good will all your richness do me?" he said, harshly.

"I thought, Dudley, that you would be pleased to know that I shared your joy," she answered, milder, set with a gentle dignity which became her well.

She was fair and sweet as the sweetest blush rose.

Her form, her rounded arms and dainty hands, her graceful shoulders and delicate neck, her small head surmounted by its burnished hair, tiny shell-like ear, the sweet mouth and deep blue eyes, were all simply perfect! And with all this, added to a faultless toilet, it was evident that not a fairer vision would grace the grand old halls of Leamington that night.

But so much bear—so loneliness had no power to soften the ill-natured man at her side; indeed, her very presence seemed to aggravate him, and to drive away all the pleasant thoughts which had been his companions ere she entered.

He laughed harshly at her last words.

"Yes, share my joys—and honors, you should have added. Honors are plenty just now, and you are welcome to share them all, madam; but I would inform you that I have precious few joys at present, and expect to have less in the future," he concluded, bitterly.

She cast down her beautiful eyes, and sighed weakly.

"You know," he continued, sullenly, "that what I hoped most for of all things has been denied me."

"I know, my husband, to what you refer," she answered, sadly. "God has seen fit to leave us children—has withheld from us that which would perpetuate our name, and give us great joy besides. The bitterness has been as great for me as for you. He knows how I would love little children—your little children, Dudley—but—"

"But what?" demanded, fiercely.

"But perhaps the future may have something better in store for us," she answered, with downward eyes.

"The future!" he sneered; "that has been yours for the last ten years. The rascals have been ne'er-do-well, I believe, through either you or me; that there should be no heir to inherit these broad lands and the honors which are fast crowding upon us."

Lady Durward took a step forward and looked intently into her husband's face.

His fierce and angry words had seemed almost to crush her at first; she had grown pale and sad; her bright face had lost all its joy, and her attitude was drooping and listless. But a sudden inspiration seemed how to animate her.

"Dudley," she said, "would you give me back your love, and treat me as the old happy days if you had it with you? Your love," she added, the color flaming into her pale cheeks, her bosom heaving, and her eyes lighting, "is the one thing in this world for which I care most. What rich honors, wealth, money, with outward show, could be more welcome than to be happier than a queen, stripped of everything which the world bows down to and worships? could I have undisputed reign in your heart, Dudley, won't you give me back the old love? Ah! I thought you would be ten-

der to-night, when the future looks so bright; and you know I love you—I love you so fondly."

How could he resist those sweet dewy eyes, raised so pleadingly to his? How could he resist the appealing touch of that little trembling hand laid so gently upon his arm, those quivering lips, and the love light which illuminated that faultlessly beautiful face?

But he only laughed a heartless, sneering laugh.

"Love!" he said. "Lady Durward, I think I never knew what the word really meant."

"You did—you know you did! Oh, why do you torture me thus?" burst in a passionate cry.

Why, indeed, when it seemed as if the angels above must have loved her tenderly, as she stood there so fair, so pure and true?

But only a mocking smile curled the lips of this heartless man at her side.

"You used to be kind and tender to me, Dudley," she moaned, "in the days of our early married life; you did, and had occasioned great rejoicing in the object of this honor, and among his sympathizers and friends.

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They are now only so far as I am able to contribute to your ambition. An enviable position mine is truly," she exclaimed, bitterly.

"Pshaw! Madeline!"

"And now," she interrupted, her voice rising higher with pain, "that honors are being heaped upon you, you would gladly the truth that binds us—you would cast me off, if you could, as Napoleon did poor Josephine, that you ambition like his, might be satisfied. Is that not your growing coldness to me means?"

I don't care so much of pursuing this obnoxious subject, Madeline," the Earl said, uneasily.

He is a good man, and a good husband, and every one is loud in their praise and admiration of the charming Lady Durward; I am not tired of that, Madeline."

"But you are tired of me personally—you are wearied of my presence your heart has ceased to overflow with affection toward me, and you care for me now only so far as I am able to contribute to your ambition. An enviable position mine is truly," she exclaimed, bitterly.

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